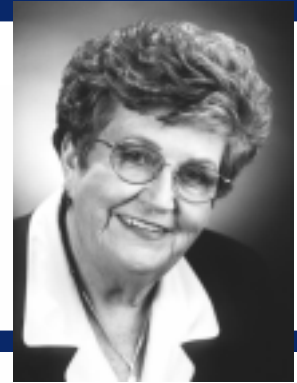




A REPORT TO THE 1ST DISTRICT



WINTER 2003

**REPRESENTATIVE
AL O'BRIEN**

**REPRESENTATIVE
JEANNE EDWARDS**

Dear Neighbors,

By the time you receive this newsletter the 2003 legislative session will be well underway. We face many challenges- a continuing economic downturn, a huge budget shortfall, persistent traffic gridlock, rising prescription drug costs, and a number of others. However, we are confident that we will tackle these problems in a manner that protects our values.

Our primary responsibility this year is to write a two-year budget for our state. We must bridge the gap in the state treasury between the revenue we bring in and the important investments in education, health care and social services that the citizens of our state depend on.

While our state budget situation is our primary focus, we are also making progress on many other issues as well. We've begun work on a package of accountability reforms designed to make sure our transportation dollars are spent as efficiently as possible. We're working on a plan to address the high cost of prescription drugs. We're also proposing legislation that will make our communities safer.

Please note that we are sending this joint newsletter to save money. Thank you for giving us the opportunity to serve you in Olympia. Feel free to contact us at any time with your feedback as we move forward in dealing with the current needs of our state.

Sincerely,

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Transportation

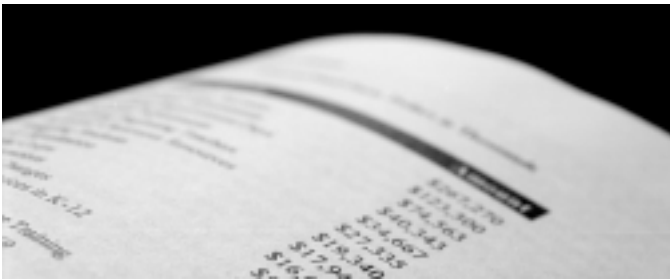
TOLL-FREE LEGISLATIVE HOTLINE: 1-800-562-6000

REPRESENTATIVES AL O'BRIEN & JEANNE EDWARDS

PROTECTING OUR PRIORITIES IN A TIGHT BUDGET

The governor has unveiled a proposed budget that contains major cuts to education, health care and social services. If enacted, these cuts will have a tremendous effect on teachers and students, the health of our citizens, and the economic security of many in our state. Fortunately, the legislative process will give us an opportunity to improve upon the governor's proposal.

While the \$2.4 billion budget deficit requires us to make some steep cuts, we are determined to maintain our commitment to building a world-class education system and to protecting low-income children and families, seniors and the disabled. These are certainly tight budget times, but even in tough times we have a responsibility to help those who are in need.



IMPLEMENTING TRANSPORTATION ACCOUNTABILITY & REFORM:

Despite the failure of Referendum 51, it is critical that we keep moving forward on our transportation problems. That's why we are leading off this session with a package of accountability and efficiency measures to streamline transportation planning.

There are three bills we are currently working on. House Bill 1122 would streamline transportation decision-making by putting the Governor directly in charge of the Transportation Secretary.

Another proposal, House Bill 1121, would institute ongoing performance audits of the Department of Transportation. These audits will have a direct effect on how transportation decisions are made. Thirdly, House Bill 1120 establishes a citizen oversight panel that will put transportation, finance, environmental and construction experts in charge of measuring the performance of our transportation system.

INVESTING IN OUR FUTURE THROUGH HIGHER EDUCATION

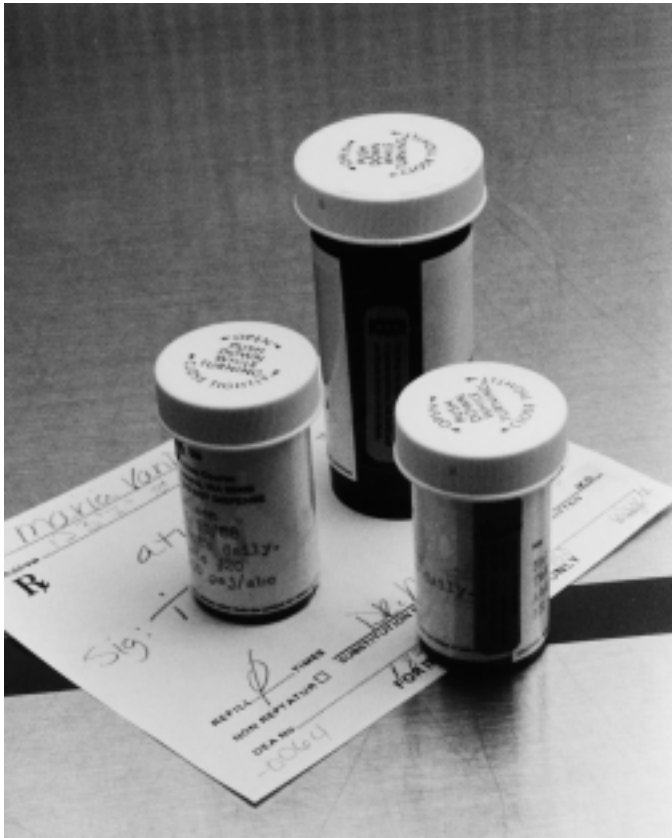
With rising enrollments at our state colleges and universities, there is an urgent need for additional classrooms, laboratories and other school facilities. Unfortunately, in recent years much of this growing demand has been placed on the backs of students and families in the form of higher tuition charges each year.

This session we are looking at ways to maintain our strong investment in state colleges and universities without punishing students and their families. If we don't invest adequately in higher education, these institutions will lose their competitive edge when it comes to recruiting faculty, students, or grant opportunities.

One idea being considered in Olympia is a proposal by former governors Dan Evans and Booth Gardner— a long-term plan to construct and renovate buildings through the issuance of state bonds, which would infuse approximately \$1.7 billion dollars into our colleges and universities.



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LOWERING THE COST OF PRESCRIPTION DRUGS:

Another crucial issue before us this year is addressing the high cost of prescription drugs. All too often people must choose between buying their medications and paying their bills. We're proposing a measure that would use the power of the free market to lower drug prices.

In short, the bill would create a list of "preferred" drugs for individuals on state health care programs (like Medicaid or the Basic Health Plan). When a less expensive drug is deemed to be as safe and effective as a brand-name drug, the cheaper version will be used, and the savings passed on to the individual. If a physician requests that a more expensive or different drug be used, he or she would only have to indicate "dispense as written." Not only would the individual benefit, but the state could save up to \$31 million yearly in prescription drug costs if the measure passes. Rep. Edwards is working hard on this and many other health care issues.

MAKING OUR COMMUNITIES SAFER:

PROTECTING COMMUNITIES AGAINST SEX PREDATOR HOUSING

The federal courts have mandated that once sex predators have completed their sentences the state must provide supervised transitional housing that is scattered evenly around the state. While we cannot avoid our legal obligation to provide these transitional facilities, we have an unflinching duty to consider the safety of our communities when siting these facilities. Right now, these structures cannot be located near such places as schools and school bus stops, churches, libraries and parks. House Bill 1099 (sponsored by Rep. O'Brien) would add public and private youth camps to this list, further ensuring that our communities are protected.

USING WELFARE ROLLS TO CATCH CRIMINALS

This session we're proposing a bill that utilizes existing government data from the Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS) to track down people who have ignored longstanding warrants for their arrest.

House Bill 1105 (also sponsored by Rep. O'Brien) would require DSHS to share information with the Washington State Patrol regarding an offender's whereabouts so that the individual can be located, and if needed, arrested. Payment of public assistance could be suspended in certain cases, depending on the length and nature of the outstanding warrant.

SPEEDING UP DRUG SENTENCING REFORM

Last year we were extremely proud to pass a drug sentencing reform law that increases the use of drug courts when dealing with non-violent offenders. Drug courts use a combination of treatment, counseling, and consultations with judges to hold offenders accountable for their crime – and their addiction. This year we are proposing legislation that will speed up the implementation of last year's bill, thus getting more drug users the treatment they need and making all of us safer as a result.

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